

NATIONAL INSTITUTE ON DRUG ABUSE

***HOW TO SUCCEED
IN SITING A DRUG ABUSE
TREATMENT CENTER***



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Public Health Service • Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration

Some words to the wise

Drug abuse treatment is important to the community. This booklet is a collection of basic principles gleaned from providers who have sited new drug abuse treatment facilities successfully. It is an overview of the steps you need to take if you are moving into or establishing a new center. Research conducted by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, as well as experience in the field, shows that most successful providers act on the same basic principles. Whether you implement them or not, it pays to *consider* all of the following suggestions. Much of it may be obvious, but it is exactly the obvious that people forget or ignore in the excitement of a startup situation.

Of course, you will tailor local solutions for each community. In all instances, though, it is critical that you do some amount of assessment to determine your community's needs and resources. And you will need help from others—one or two people can not do it alone.

The best way to win support is not to create opposition. You will need to develop a siting strategy which will help you avoid actions that generate unnecessary resistance. When you think through your situation armed with this guide, you are likely to discover that you have more contacts than you realize and can tap into your resources to develop support.

And finally, getting sited is not the end. Opposition can appear anytime. Stay aware by keeping your assessment of the community up to date from day one. Even a good relationship with the community needs maintenance.

FIVE TIPS FOR ASSESING YOUR SITUATION

1. **Identify people most and least likely to support.** Historically, who has supported or opposed community facilities for drug treatment? Who is most likely to understand the need for your facility and be of help to you? Physicians, social service providers, police, ministers, and teachers may be natural supporters, although not necessarily. It all depends on local circumstances.
2. **Identify key people who can affect your success.** Who has formal power (zoning board members) or informal power (heads of neighborhood organizations) to make or break your siting effort?
3. **Identify the community's need for treatment.** Document information and statistics from local law enforcement agencies and medical and treatment programs. Use it to demonstrate the extent of the community's drug abuse problem and need for treatment. Look for numbers of drug-related arrests, emergency room admissions, and treatment waiting lists.
4. **Check out prevailing attitudes about drug abuse and treatment.** They are often based on inaccurate beliefs. Review local newspapers and talk with treatment and service program providers who have attempted to site or who are already in the community. Half-way houses for the mentally retarded and other community-based facilities may have information to offer.
5. **Plug into community networks.** Understand how things work in your community: how can local politics affect your facility? Is the local city council member running for reelection? Find out customs, courtesies, and sensitivities among people who live and work in the community.



HOW TO DEVELOP SUPPORTERS IN THE COMMUNITY

Make key contacts. Schedule meetings with community leaders to provide them with information and to gain their support or at least their neutrality. Find out if your board members know community leaders and can speak to them about the importance of your facility.

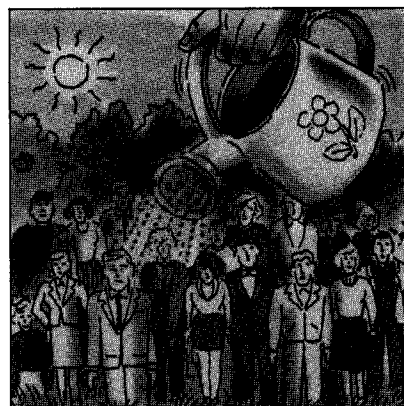
Network. Join forces with other community groups to build support and recruit volunteers to help educate the community about the need for, and benefits of treatment. Inform people in related professions about what you are trying to do. Contact civic groups, community service organizations, social services, health care organizations, and church groups. Offer to speak at their meetings. Request volunteer speakers from the recovery community, families of people in treatment, and private firms that encourage volunteerism in their corporate culture.

Build relations with local media. Introduce your organization as a source of expertise on drug abuse and treatment to local TV, radio, and print media. Offer background information about the local drug problem. Provide as much accurate information about treatment as you can. Invite radio and TV stations to air the “Drugbusters: Don’t Let Drugs Win” public service announcements developed by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (see back page for ordering information).

Be aware of barriers within the profession. Old grudges and turf struggles among treatment providers can mean trouble. Do your part to heal old wounds, support colleagues, and work together to promote treatment as a benefit to the community. The success of any treatment provider contributes to positive community regard for all.

Appoint an active board of directors or advisory board. Include influential community members willing to work as your advocates. Consider inviting someone who has opposed your facility to sit on the board.

Retain an experienced attorney. A lawyer who understands zoning, leases, real estate, and other issues related to siting will be an important member of your team.



THE ABC'S OF CHOOSING THE RIGHT LOCATION

Anticipate potential problems. Choose a location least likely to generate opposition.

Review the neighborhood composition of possible sites. Find out who lives there, what schools, businesses, or organizations are located there. Try to avoid problems such as siting too near a school, which often raises community concerns.

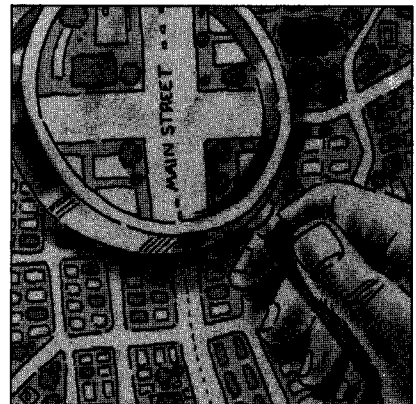
Consider whether you can locate in a nonresidential area without sacrificing accessibility to public transportation.

Beware of selecting a site for which other plans have been made. Check with the local planning board or appropriate city or county governmental agency.

Contact local zoning or planning boards early in your campaign to identify regulations. Expect delays.

Make it a priority to find space that does not need rezoning and, therefore, will not require public hearings. Assemble as many expert and lay supporters as you can to testify on your behalf at public hearings if they are required. Be ready to compromise, but know what you can and can not afford to bargain away.

Design your facility to fit in with other buildings in the neighborhood. Keep your property neat and clean.



A CHECKLIST FOR GOOD COMMUNITY RELATIONS



Listen and respond to community concerns. Community resistance usually occurs because of fears about safety and security, especially in relation to children, and about potential damage to neighborhood property values. While some fears may be irrational, others may have a basis in reality, so take measures to address people's anxieties.



Be politically and culturally sensitive to your community.



Develop and implement security procedures. Establish strict policies for client conduct (e.g., no loitering and no unnecessary noise or disruption in the neighborhood). Consider making these policies known to the community. This will reassure the community and protect its safety.



Make use of what you learned during your assessment and use community contacts.



Consider providing job and family counseling to clients. Many people feel these services help make treatment more effective. Keeping the community informed may even induce employers and business owners to come forward with job offers for your clients.

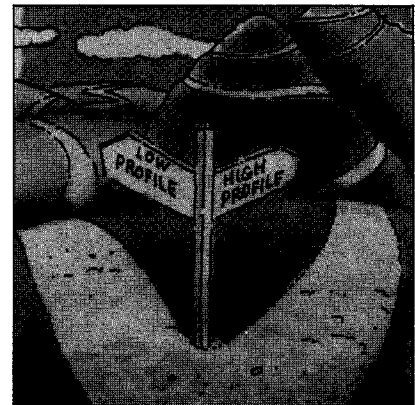


Always anticipate the potential for opposition. Protect your enterprise by planning for the worst, anticipating possible problems, and preparing responses. The earlier you plan, the better off you will be. Avoid actions that generate unnecessary opposition.



BASIC STRATEGIES FOR RELATING TO THE COMMUNITY

- 1. Select your approach for communicating with the community.**
Your strategy may lie anywhere on a continuum from high profile (full community involvement) to low profile (no community involvement).
 - a. A low-profile strategy, at first consideration, often seems appealing and sometimes does work. Evidence suggests that people may sometimes be more accepting of treatment centers once they have been located successfully in a neighborhood. This strategy is risky, however. If opposition develops, you may lose your chance to tell people the truth about your center. Rumors and suspicions are damaging even when not true.
 - b. A high-profile strategy is usually more effective and should be considered whenever possible. Gain support by: raising community awareness of treatment, educating the public about drug abuse and the need for treatment, and talking directly to community people.
- 2. Develop a media strategy even if you are not planning a media campaign.**
Once you choose an overall strategy, prepare a plan for responding to media attention in case any develops. Select credible, knowledgeable spokespeople. Develop a clear, thoughtful, and concise statement of purpose so that your communication will be consistent.



EDUCATING THE COMMUNITY IS A MUST

The more people know about drug abuse and treatment, the less likely they are to react to rumors or misinformation. Take time to prepare responses to possible questions from the community or journalists. Even though you are busy, do not procrastinate or omit this step.

Combine person-to-person interactions with the use of media materials. This is the most effective way to affect attitudes and behavior. Tailor messages to address local concerns and raise awareness about treatment.

- Use the videotape, pamphlets, and public service announcements produced by the National Institute on Drug Abuse to educate the public about the benefits of treatment, to gain community support, and to recruit volunteers.
- Speak with local opinion leaders to discuss treatment as one solution to the drug problem and to answer questions and concerns. Use the videotape documentary and pamphlets to reinforce the message.
- If you are taking the recommended high-profile approach, distribute the pamphlets around the neighborhood in person, using the opportunity to talk about your facility with neighbors, business people, and others who have vested interests in the community.
- Go public—hold an open house before your facility opens. Invite local dignitaries and other influential people (e.g. the mayor). Introduce neighbors to counselors. Invite speakers who will relate effectively to local visitors. Be prepared with good, truthful, and thorough answers to questions about safety, property values, and whether treatment works.



HINTS ABOUT PUTTING YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD

- A. People will judge your facility on the appearance and behavior of staff and supporters, so encourage everybody on your team to maintain a “dress for success” code appropriate to the neighborhood style.
- B. Represent yourself as the competent, informed professional that you are. Learn everything you can about the effectiveness of treatment. If necessary, collect information from other providers, your State agency for substance abuse, or the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Or, bring in a treatment expert to help.
- C. Act responsibly and be beyond reproach. If people feel you are being dishonest or trying to pull the wool over their eyes, you will ruin it for yourself and anyone else who tries to site a center in the community. Comply with legal requirements, avoiding even the appearance of irregularity, conflict of interest, real estate “deals,” etc.
- D. Select your most effective spokespeople to represent you at public meetings. Consider the impression they make in terms of appearance, temperament, and professionalism. Your spokespeople should be able to relate culturally to the community, be articulate, and well informed. They should answer tough questions in a positive, accurate, and constructive way. They should be prepared to speak about the nature and scope of treatment, security procedures, parking and traffic flow, and other technical issues.
- E. Answer questions carefully and honestly. You need not share all your internal business affairs, but what you tell people must be true. Glossing over truth may work in the short run but in the long run it could discredit you.
- F. When you face opposition from community people, show respect for their points of view. Their concerns may be legitimate, and by listening carefully you may gain insight and find ways to address them.



*DO THE RIGHT THING:
MAINTAIN POSITIVE COMMUNITY RELATIONS*

Deliver on your promises. Security, facility appearance, and other issues are important to your neighbors. Keep your facility neat, clean, quiet, and in good repair.

Be a good neighbor. Participate in, or organize neighborhood events such as picnics or clean-ups. Provide services to community people where you can, such as drug prevention and drug education. Volunteer the use of your facility for community meetings. Invite neighbors to an open house, barbecue, or other appropriate activity with your clients.

Keep neighbors informed about your services and achievements. Consider developing a newsletter in which clients and neighbors might participate.

Maintain an open door policy for neighbors. Do not make it hard for people to see you. Be available to address concerns and answer questions. Show you are willing to have a dialogue with the community.

Even after siting, continue your assessment process. As neighbors come and go, support for your facility can wax and wane. It only takes one person to stir up opposition, so be aware of the potential effects of changes.



How to get more information:

The National Institute on Drug Abuse has developed a series of resource materials including a Resource Manual packed with more detailed information on siting. There is also a series of media materials available which include: *The Door to Recovery*, a video documentary and its companion presenter's guide; a series of six pamphlets; and "Drugbusters: Don't Let Drugs Win" TV and radio public service announcements, print ads, and a poster. All of these media products are especially useful in educating your community about the benefits of local drug treatment programs.

For free copies of these materials contact:

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
P.O. Box 2345
Rockville, MD 20852

In MD and DC Metro Area call

(800) 729-6686 (301) 468-2600

For more information on siting treatment centers, contact:
A. Yowell, Ph.D., (301) 443-1124.

Feel free to duplicate this pamphlet in whatever quantity you wish.

